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Memorandum

To: ENRP Co-Chairs Sean O'Connor & Barry Weinstein, MD

From: Tourism & Culture Chair Robert Blanchard

Re: August & September 2003 meetings

Date: September 26, 2003

The Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership's Tourism & Culture Subcommittee met August 19 at the Buffalo Niagara CVB, and September 19, 2003 at the Niagara Falls Comfort Inn. Present for the August meeting were subcommittee members Blanchard, Lawson (proxy), Casale, Geiger (proxy), and Rosenwasser. Present for the September meeting (a joint meeting with the Transportation Subcommittee) were subcommittee members Blanchard, O'Connor, and Casale, as well as members of the Transportation Subcommittee and Shea's Performing Arts Center Executive Director Anthony Conte.

Tourist Signage

At the June 6 general meeting approval was granted to offer the ENRP's services to the Regional Cultural Tourism Initiative to act as the implementer of a comprehensive attraction sign program for Erie and Niagara Counties. Efforts to that end should commence after the Regional Cultural Tourism Initiative's final report comes out at the end of the year.

In the meantime, a pilot project for the City of Buffalo has been ongoing this year. We were at the point where signs could be produced and installed, but then the city decided to take another look at engineering issues on which they were previously silent. Their new report should be completed by the September general meeting, at which time next steps for the pilot can be determined.

Buffalo Niagara Cultural Tourism Initiative

Following last year's issuance of the report, "Cultural Tourism in The Buffalo-Niagara Region: Developing A Comprehensive Plan Phase 1: Inventory of Cultural Tourism Planning Initiatives, Recommendations for Pursuing a Comprehensive Plan," the UB Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth, through funding from the John R. Oishei Foundation

and Erie County, has begun the next phase of the Regional Cultural Tourism Initiative.

Work is being done by three subcommittees – capacity building, marketing, and implementation. Subcommittee Chair Blanchard is also chairing the Initiative's implementation subcommittee; ENRP Administrator Tod A. Kniazuk is acting as the group's representative, and several ENRP members are present to represent their various organizations. The project has moved into a strategy phase, and is on track to have a set of recommendations – in the form of a comprehensive plan for cultural tourism – ready by the end of the year for implementation in 2004. The aforementioned tourist signage project will be one of those recommendations.

Buffalo-Niagara Tourist Transportation

Another of the issues coming to the fore in the Initiative is the need for tourist transportation between Buffalo and Niagara Falls, especially now that plans show that in 2004 both cities will have trolleys operating within their borders, but no connector between them.

The ENRP was involved in a two-year pilot Buffalo-Niagara Tourist Express that has its second year put on hold by the BNCVB and Erie County. Now, the BNCVB has identified a project like this as one of its 2004 priorities, and has asked Shea's Performing Arts Center Executive Director Anthony Conte to chair the subcommittee to create it (ENRP Administrator Tod Kniazuk is also serving on this group). It was felt that ENRP Tourism & Culture should assist in this effort, as we unanimously voted to pursue the Tourist Express again in 2004.

The BNCVB's original proposal mentions rail as the vehicle for transit, and indeed many on the Subcommittee feel that rail is an attraction itself, in addition to its practical use. Concerns were voiced, however, that issues such as the current condition of the lines, liability issues, and the negotiating process that will be needed with CSX make rail a better long-term goal. The GBNRTC had previously commissioned Amtrak to work up some projections of potential cost and riders.

In the near term, it was felt that something similar to the Tourist Express can fit the bill. Several changes must be made, such as getting the CVBs, hotels, attractions, the public, and possibly the casino(s) involved early on in the process, securing a multi-year funding mechanism for operations, and linking to existing efforts. The timing of the release of the Cultural Tourism Initiative and Regional Economic Development Strategy offer a window of opportunity for this project.

The ENRP Tourism & Culture Subcommittee recommends that the Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership offer its support to the BNCVB in the creation of a tourist transportation link between Buffalo and Niagara Falls.

Other Issues

Other issues discussed included proposed New York State “Culture Zone” legislation, and motorcoach parking rates.